



## Breaking Barriers to Inclusion: Assessing Job Security, School-to-Work Transition and Discouragement Effects of Youth in Nigeria

Jamilu Said Babangida

*The United Nations has reported Nigeria's population at 212 million for the end of 2021. Ostensibly, Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world with more than 50% of the population below 30 years of age and 35% of its population within the 15-34 age group. This young population could be Nigeria's greatest asset if properly harnessed, leading to an expanded workforce, increased productivity, and inclusive economic growth. However, the reality in Nigeria today is that the majority of young jobseekers are afforded few opportunities for stable economic income. As a result, rather than the country taking advantage of this opportunity for growth and development, Nigeria is regressing to be among the countries with the highest poverty rates and highest youth unemployment rates in the world.*

*How to reduce the barriers and constraints that youth face to economic and, more specifically, labour market inclusion is a critical question if Nigeria is to continue developing. This study aims to make several contributions to answering this question. First, it seeks to find answers to the sources of exclusion of youth from the labour market. Second, it assesses the school-to-work transition and job security of those that were successful in securing 'good' jobs post education. Third, the study investigates the stress and discouragement faced by youth due to lack of success in and exclusion from the labour market. Lastly, in a view to designing policy in the future, the study seeks to investigate the preferences and aspirations of youth in the Nigerian labour market. For the purpose of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data is collected through a brief survey of 1146 young individuals aged 15 to 35 years old across six geopolitical zones in Nigeria.*

*The issue of youth unemployment is pervasive amongst countries with fast-growing populations. How to absorb the millions of new workers joining the labour force each year will be a significant challenge across sub-Saharan Africa. This study will help identify barriers that youth face in the labour market and potential policy solutions to these constraints.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As the world's youngest region, improving employment opportunities for Sub-Saharan Africa's youthful population is important for several reasons, including the fact that most people work their way out of poverty (Fox & Gandhi, 2021). Projections show that Africa's share of the world's youth population will grow from one fifth in 2012 to as high as one third by the year 2050, with West, Central, and East Africa accounting for much of the bulge (AfDB, 2015). As the country with the largest economy in Africa, Nigeria is endowed with both human and natural resources. It is rich in abundant crude oil deposits, minerals, arable land, and human resources (Odeh & Okoye, 2014). Nigeria is also among developing countries with the largest population. The United Nations has reported Nigeria's population at 212 million by the end of 2021. Ostensibly, Nigeria has one of the youngest populations globally, with more than 50 percent of the people below 30 years of age and 35 percent of its population within the 15 to 34 age group (Oviawe, 2010). If adequately harnessed, this young population could be Nigeria's most significant asset, leading to an expanded workforce, increased productivity, and inclusive economic growth. However, the reality in Nigeria today is that most young jobseekers are afforded few opportunities for stable economic income. As a result, rather than the country taking advantage of its youthful population to spur growth and development, Nigeria is regressing to be among the countries with high poverty and youth unemployment rates ((National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2020a, 2020b)). Although youth unemployment is a global challenge limiting the development of most economies, in Africa, the potential of youthful populations and the nature of the constraints they face differ depending on individual characteristics, gender, and location (Shubha et al., 2017). With a rapidly growing population, it is expected that the youth unemployment rate will rise. For example, one in three Nigerian youth are unemployed (NBS, 2021). Youth unemployment is a global socioeconomic problem in need of an immediate solution. Developed countries have taken the youth unemployment threat seriously by designing structural policies to abate youth labour market exclusion. Similarly, Nigeria has rolled out several policies for youth employment. However, these policies have had little effect, suggesting that more needs to be done to have notable success.

With a labour force participation of 54.9 percent (ILO, 2020; ILOSTAT, 2019), Nigerian youths face some critical problems emanating from stress, job insecurity, and discouragement among youthful populations. These problems are rapidly changing the nature of the labour market through the apathy of youth in the labour force. There is a widespread problem of youth unemployment across the country (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2020b), which could be as a result of some barriers in the labour market. Reducing these barriers and constraints that youth

face to socioeconomic and, more specifically, labour market inclusion is a critical first step if Nigeria wants to continue developing and meet the sustainable development goal 8 on decent work and economic growth by 2030 (United Nations, 2019). This study aims to make several contributions by answering questions about the nature of the barriers that youths face. Guided by ILO (ILO, 2017, 2018), this study first seeks to find answers to the sources of exclusion of youth from the labour market. Second, it assesses the difficulties in school-to-work transition and the level of job security of those who successfully secured 'good' jobs post-education. Third, the study investigates the extent of stress and discouragement faced by youth due to lack of success in gaining employment and being excluded from the labour market. Lastly, in a view to inform future policy interventions that are effective, the study seeks to investigate the preferences and aspirations of youth in their quest to participate in the Nigerian labour market.

To achieve these objectives, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a brief survey of young individuals across six geopolitical zones in Nigeria from 13 December 2021 to 9 January 2022. In the context of this study, and as defined by African Charter, youth are all individuals within the 15 to 35 age cohort. This wider band recognises that the full transition into adulthood and employment can be a protracted process (Betcherman & Khan, 2015). The issue of youth unemployment is pervasive amongst countries with fast-growing populations, and this underscores the importance of having a functional and comparable definition of the concept. Absorbing the millions of new workers joining the labour force each year is a significant youth-specific challenge across Sub-Saharan Africa (Irwin et al., 2018). Against this background, this study will help identify barriers to youth inclusion in the labour market and potential policy solutions to address these constraints using Nigeria as a case study.

Several studies have previously considered similar questions addressed by this research. For example, an early study by Wooden (1999) reviewed impediments to the employment of young people in Australia. He identified that shift in the composition of demand for labour in favour of highly skilled, overall economic levels, weak system of vocational education and training, and youth wages and labour costs serve as factors that impede youth employment. Another paper by Ryan (2001) discusses research findings on school-to-work-transition for seven advanced economies. He found that social disadvantage plays great role in increasing difficulties faced by youths in the labour market for most of the countries. In a more recent study focusing on Africa, Shubha et al. (2017) discussed the specific barriers that youth face in accessing employment in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the ways in which young women's employment is constrained relative to male. They documented that low skills, access to capital, networks/information asymmetry, time and

family formation/care responsibilities, occupational choice, and safety and mobility to be the main constraints affecting youth in the labour market. Similarly, Dimova et al. (2016) examined labour market transitions of young women and men focusing on the Middle East and North Africa. They found that increasing educational attainment, especially among female and insufficient skilled labour demand are the main sources of difficulties for youth transition in the labour market. This leads youth to discouragement from job search and migration to other countries for better opportunities.

Using two local municipalities in South Africa as a case study, Jongh (2017) sought to determine the main employment barriers faced by the youth as well as compare work search behaviour among different youth groupings. He found that factors such as inadequate skills, education level, low labour market information, ineffective job search strategies, lack of social capital to be the barriers that prevent youth from having employment in South Africa. Awad (2020) used data from the school-to-work transition survey of the International Labour Office (ILO) to compare the educational attainment level with their status in work among the youth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Madagascar. He found that youths in both countries are characterised by low educational level and skills sought for by employers. This indicate that they have weak human capital to facilitate their transition from school to work. The key factor that give explanation to the low education level and weak labour market skills is the cost of schooling as an economic issue. Bäckman & Nilsson (2016) studied the consequences of not being in education, employment and training (NEET) in young adulthood in three Swedish birth cohorts. They find that people with weak ties to labour market face higher risk of exclusion. This study makes a several contribution in this direction focusing on youth in the Nigerian labour market. First, it seeks to find answers to the sources of exclusion of youth from the labour market. Second, it assesses the school-to-work transition and job security of those that were successful in securing 'good' jobs post education. Third, this study builds on previous literature to investigate the stress and discouragement faced by youth due to lack of success in and exclusion from the labour market as well as investigate the preferences and aspirations of youth in the Nigerian labour market.

## THEORY AND POLICY CONTEXT

In general, the interaction between demand and supply of labour provides a framework for thinking about how employment levels are determined. Other institutional rigidities that prevent wages (and other labour costs) from adjusting to shifts in these forces are also important. On the

demand-side, the most important factors are likely to be changes in consumer demand for the final product, changes in the price of labour relative to other inputs, changes in the relative productivity of labour, and employer tastes or preferences. On the supply-side, relevant factors include changes in unemployment benefits, the tastes and preferences of individuals for work, and demographic factors (Wooden, 1999). Given that the focus of this study is on youth employment, other dimensions that could be added to the analysis include the share of youths in total employment and the substitution of youths for adult labour for several socioeconomic reasons (Wooden, 1999). Most policy interventions have focused on the supply side as young people face particular constraints specific to them, such as poor employer perceptions of them, a lack of entry-level jobs, a lack of work experience, inefficient information systems, and weak access to credit (Haider, 2016). A critical review of literature on youth and labour markets in Africa have documented the causes of labour market disadvantage from both the supply and demand sides. For instance, a sample of such factors include state of the economy, imperfect information in labour market, employer perceptions, rising youth population, skills mismatch, etc (Jean-Pierre et al., 2007; Haider, 2016; Baah-Boateng, 2016).

Several policies have been designed to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria over the years. For instance, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was established in 2006 during the democratic rule of President Olusegun Obasanjo to eradicate poverty. It initiated the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) to tackle youth unemployment, however, this program faced a lack of political will to allocate funds towards employment creation. Due to high unemployment and poverty, the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) was introduced in 2012 to offer internship and training opportunities to unemployed people. The policy recorded success in the first year by giving 50,000 unemployed graduates the opportunity to acquire skills and experience in private institutions. The National Social Investment Program (NSIP) was introduced in 2016 to help unemployed persons and businesses with loans, jobs, and training. The N-Power Program was introduced in the same year to create 600,000 new jobs for youth through entrepreneurship development and skill acquisition. Recently, the Nigerian Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP) was conceived to create about 8 million jobs in critical areas such as agriculture and housing. This program also provides survival funds to individuals and SMEs. However, these policies aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty recorded few successes, and their impact has remained low. In addition to financial problems, the policies were hindered by poor governance and inconsistency, as well as a lack of suitable partners and stakeholders in administration, implementation, and evaluation. Odeh & Okoye (2014) argued that these programs

and other youth unemployment schemes are run in isolation from other growth partners. This underscores their inability to exert a significant impact in eradicating the pressing youth unemployment. A general review of policy interventions to address youth unemployment and underemployment in Africa by Betcherman & Themrise (2018) has also suggested that existing programs are disproportionately focused on the formal wage sector and do not adequately reflect the reality that most young people work in agriculture, household enterprises, and self-employment and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. They argued that better data and evaluation are needed for more effective policy interventions.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

A quick survey of young people across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for this study. The survey's target population includes all young people in the country aged 15 to 35 years old' and randomly draws from within the respective populations in eight states across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. 'To ensure a variety of states were included, one state was selected from each of the six zones. Based on National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) guidelines, Lagos and Kano were treated as outlier states due to their population size and comprise the remaining two of the eight states selected. Face-to-face survey method was adopted to interview respondents at home or public places. Sample above and below the age bracket are automatically disqualified upon answering the survey questions. The target samples are chosen at random within each sampling unit to avoid selection bias. The response rate for the survey stands at 95.6 (only about 53 respondents choose not to respond across all the states). However, one of the limitations of this survey is that there is likely a gender imbalance in the sample as we face low response rate among females. This attracts a disproportionate number of respondents of the male gender than female gender particularly in the northern region.

### Background

The total sample consists of 1146 youth, with a representative sample of over 100 youth per state. Each state makes up around 10 percent of the total sample except Kano, Anambra, and Lagos having approximately 21, 14 and 13 percent respectively (see figure 1). The survey was conducted to identify the sources of youth exclusion from the labour market, school-to-work transition and, for those employed, the extent of job security. In line with the sources of exclusion, we also sought to investigate the psychological effects of exclusion as well as youth preferences and aspirations.

Males participated in the survey at a higher rate (59.5 percent) than females (40.5 percent) (see figure 2). Comprising 36.8 percent of the sample, youth between the ages of 21 and 25 are the largest group in this survey. This is closely followed by youth in the 26 to 30 age group with 33.2 percent. Respondents in the 15 to 20 and 31 to 35 age groups both comprise less than 20 percent of the total sample (see figure 3). Over half of the respondents are single, with only a small percentage of the total sample being married particularly among males. According to the survey results, more than 80 percent of the sample completed high school, suggesting that most of the young population have completed at least 11 years of education. From the sample, about 57.1% are shown to be unemployed.

Figure 1: Sample Distribution Across States

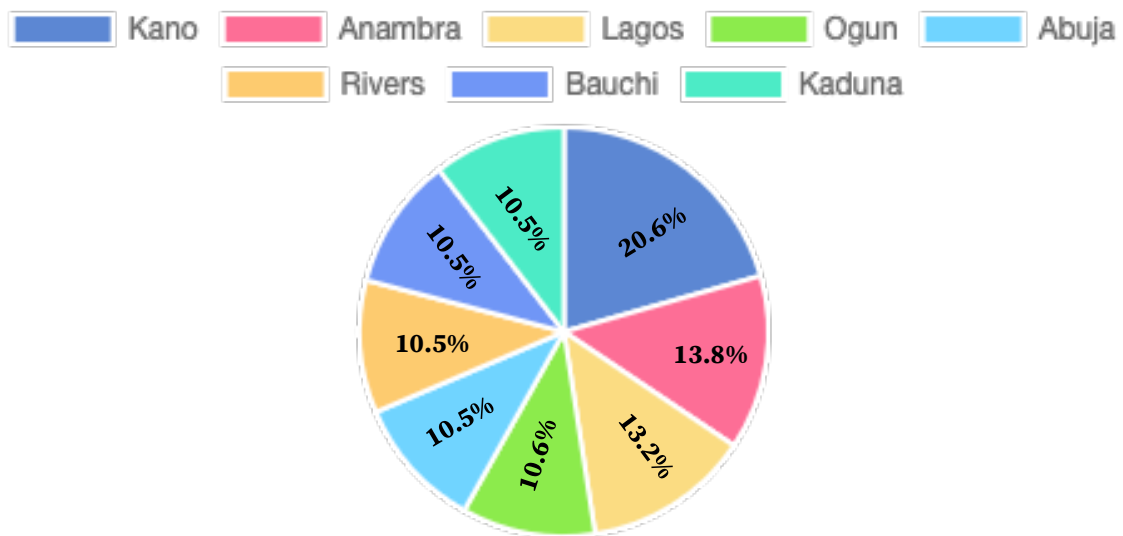


Figure 2: Gender Distribution.

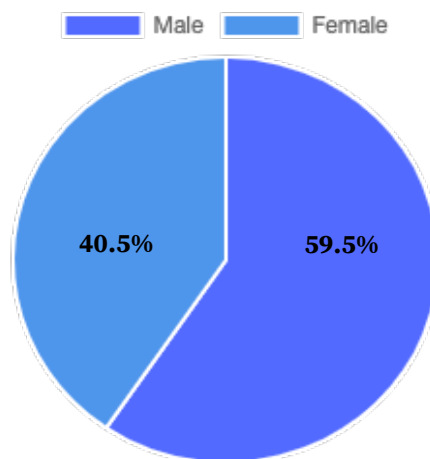


Figure 3: Age Distribution of Sample

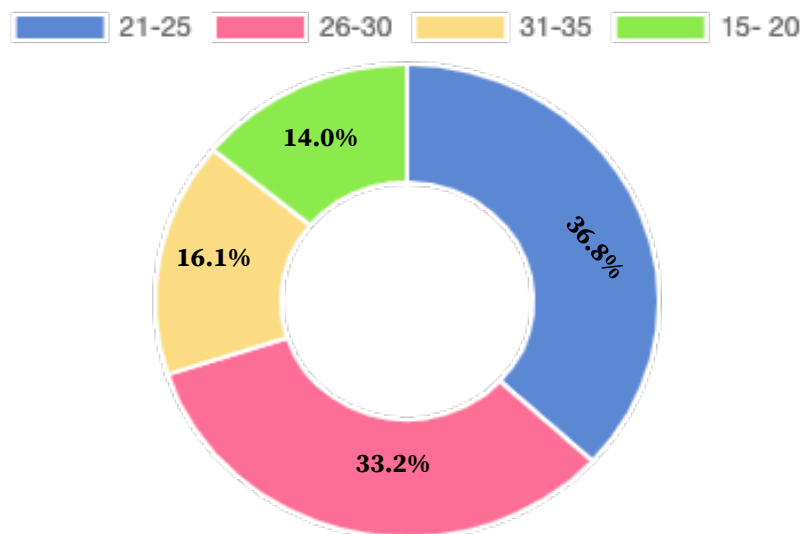
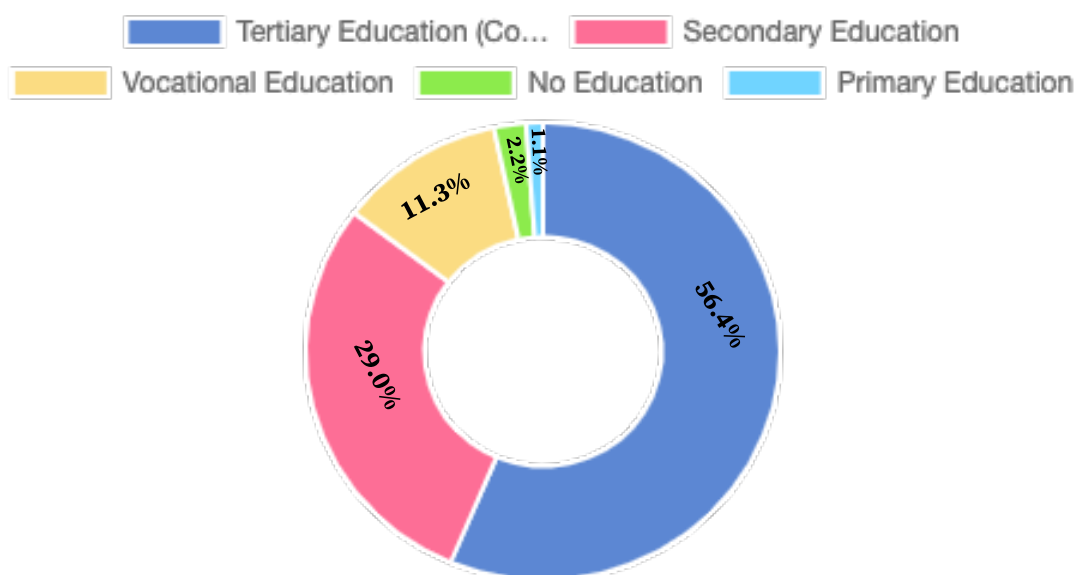


Figure 4: Education Level of Youth

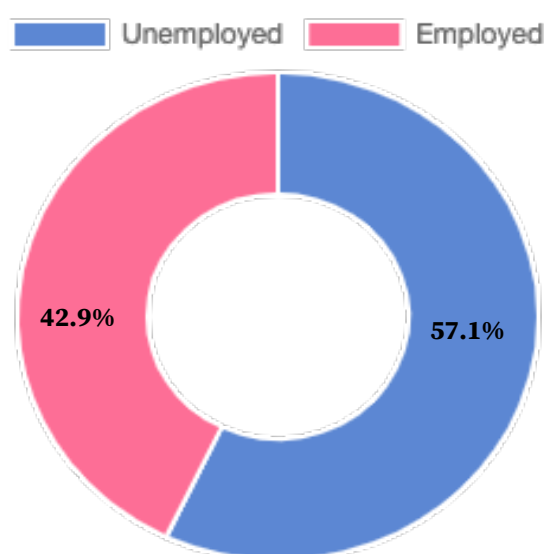


Unemployment is a severe socioeconomic challenge among youth in Nigeria. The survey reported that 57.1 percent of the sampled youths are unemployed (see figure 5). This number is close to the 2020 youth unemployment rate estimate of 53.4 percent (NBS, 2021). This implies that less than half of the youths surveyed are found to be employed (about 42.9 percent). This high level of youth unemployment could be rooted in structural obstacles preventing the school-to-work transition of youths in emerging economies (Axelrad et al., 2018). The survey reveals the duration



in which the employed youth waited in the labour market before they got employed. The survey shows that 35.4 percent of employed youth find their first job within one to five years, while 60 percent are employed within 12 months. Also, one out of two unemployed youths have been unemployed for at least three years, implying that the transition from school to work is weak. The survey results showed that 50.8 percent of unemployed youth have been unemployed for less than three years, 37.3 percent for about three to five years, and 11.9 percent for about six to ten years. This long delay in transition to gainful employment has resulted in a large percentage of the youth having interest in any job available. Evidence indicates that the longer the waiting period, the lower the probability of entering the labour market and finding a job. This is because of the belief employers hold that a candidate may have experienced skills erosion due to the long waiting period (Shimer, 2008). Most of the unemployed youths reported that they had applied to several job openings before securing one. Among the 492 employed youth, a large number are tenure workers (44.1 percent), while those working as contract and casual workers constitute around 22 percent each.

Figure 5: Status of Youth in the labour market



Interestingly, the survey results also revealed the notable role of the private sector as the leading employer of labour in Nigeria. A large percentage of the youth are employed in the private sector (47.4 percent) compared to the public sector (24.2 percent), which provides relatively less employment for young people in Nigeria. Informal work is also pervasive among the young employed population (17.5 percent) due to the limited opportunities for decent jobs. The Nigerian

labour market continues to grow in informality because most youth, particularly new entrants, are unable to find work in the formal section and instead depend on informal jobs for their livelihood.

Questions on the level youth satisfaction with wage compensation got an expected response which was that wage compensation was unsatisfactory. The majority of the youth (65.7 percent) indicated they are not very satisfied with their earnings. More positively, however, a significant number of young people (63.6 percent) believe they have job security. The remaining 36.4 percent who believe they don't have job security selected the nature of employment as the main factor. Performance consideration, toxic working environment, gender, and experience were also factors. The fear of losing their job encourages many to continue seeking alternative employment with better security. Those not seeking a different job are deterred due to lack of job opportunities, low education level, lack of confidence in successfully applying, lack of relevant experience, and discouragement from labour market. A significant number of the sampled unemployed youths (45.7 percent) have felt discouraged from seeking employment due to few job opportunities, unattractive wages, lack of required qualification skills, as well as lack of information about jobs. About 12.5 percent out of the total sample and 21.9 percent of unemployed youth sample reported that they had refused job offers in the past due to low wages, inconducive work environment, career advancement considerations, location considerations, and skills mismatch. In addition, many youths are beginning to see migration as an option for them to get employed (76.7 percent). This suggests that unemployment could potentially be a factor in driving youths to migrate from one location to another in Nigeria in search of work, even though it's conditioned on a certain wage level. About 248 of the 654 unemployed teenagers in the sample applied for at least six jobs, and 126 were invited for an interview but were not hired, suggesting a high level of mismatch between expected and actual skills/knowledge.

The economic exclusion of youth manifests itself in high unemployment and low-quality employment (Bouarbat & Ajbilou, 2007). The survey findings suggest that there is a notable presence of unemployment among educated youths in Nigeria. If young people believe that schools have low success in imparting the necessary skills for the labour market, this could give a negative signal that securing higher qualifications does not guarantee better opportunities.

67 percent of the sampled youths face difficulty searching for a job (see figure 6). Relying on help from family ranked topmost (32.6 percent) among the methods used in getting employment, which may indicate that job information is not accessible without connections from family. Seeking jobs for youths with no family connections is often difficult, without payment of bribes and certain other forms of inducements. That is, corruption is a key factor in getting employment in Nigeria.

Additionally, media outlets are a crucial method youth use in seeking information about employment (26.9 percent) (see figure 7). Others utilize the methods of visiting establishments, using social networks, employment agencies and job fairs to seek employment.

Figure 6: Youth Level Difficulty in Searching for Job

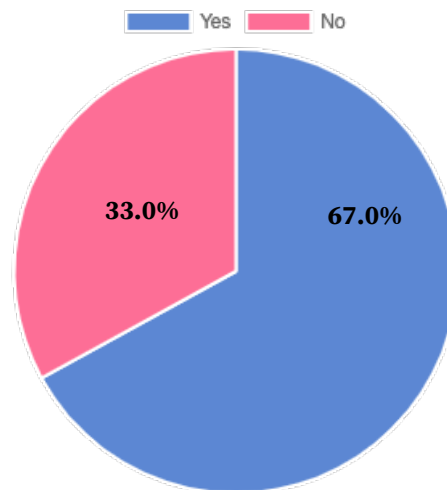
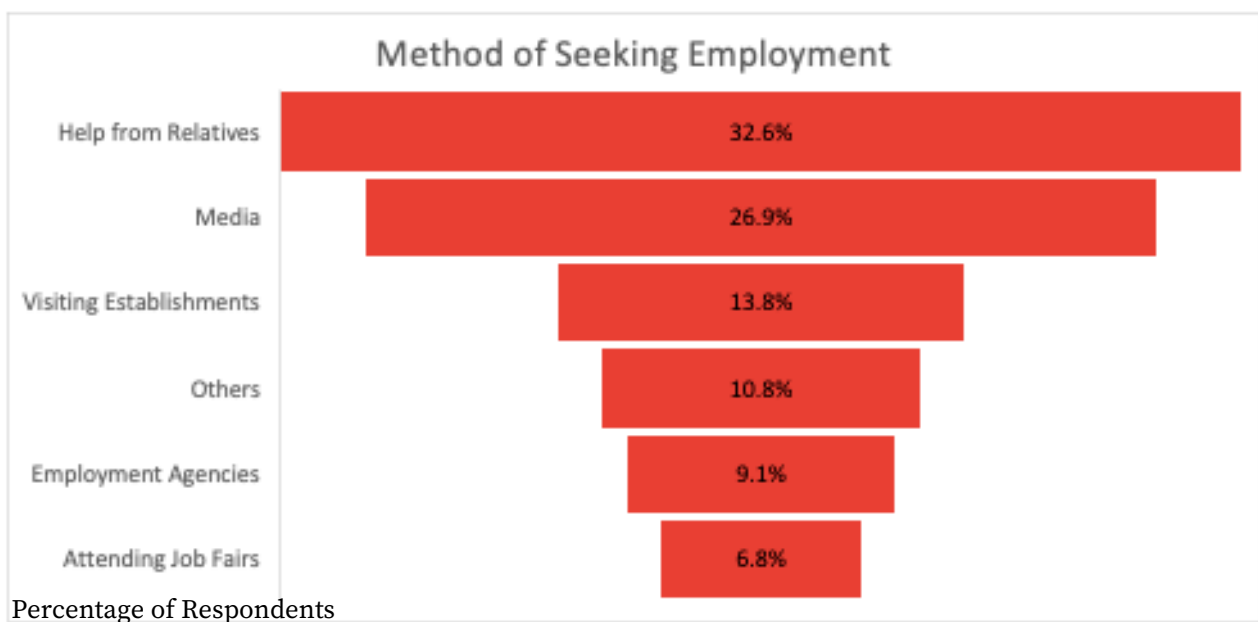


Figure 7: Methods used of seeking employment information/employment



Percentage of Respondents

### Sources of Youth Exclusion

Having job opportunity is an essential factor for achieving youth inclusion. The survey results reveal that youths (64.8 percent) face a plethora of barriers in the labour market. The respondents were asked to rank the sources of their exclusion based on its importance to them. As can be seen from figure 8 below, the options were zero as not important, one for important, and two for very important. The results revealed a great deal of evidence of youth sources of exclusion, with age considered as a significant barrier limiting young people from getting employed and achieving economic freedom. Youths within 15-29 years are more likely to face exclusionary barriers than older individuals in Nigeria (Birchall, 2019). Additionally, youth exclusion in the labour market also has some gender and religious colourations. The youth face exclusionary barriers based on their gender as results show that women are more likely to be significantly excluded, with a majority having been deprived of schooling, particularly in the Northern region. Young women are also more likely to face difficulties finding a job compared to their male counterparts. Combining family childcare with their job presents a barrier to job stability, job search and career development. Among those married, they indicated marriage to pose a barrier in their search for jobs. Further results show that people living with disability and illnesses have a fewer opportunities in the labour market. The survey results revealed that disability and illness serve as significant sources of youth exclusion from the labour market. Ethnicity also plays a vital role in fuelling exclusion. A higher percentage of youths belonging to the majority ethnic groups are more likely to be employed as compared to those from minority groups.

Quality education is another crucial determinant of job opportunities and inclusion. It is central to understanding the nature of exclusion youth face. Limited access to quality education/training among youth is an important source of exclusion and presents them with poor employment prospects and opportunities. The issue of quality education has remained a challenge in Nigeria, even in providing essential skills for employment. Young people are the most vulnerable class in the economy, facing more barriers in the labour market. The number of young people with higher educational qualifications entering the labour force has increased over the years. Unfortunately, there are fewer job opportunities which is also a significant exclusionary factor among youths. The situation in the Nigerian labour market has worsened remarkably in terms of access to job opportunities and the quality of jobs. Rapid population growth has added to the scope of exclusion, also putting pressure on the existing labour market opportunities. Young jobseekers often suffer from a skills mismatch. Due to outdated curricula and a disconnect between industries and educational institutions, students have skills that are not relevant, which contributes to long

periods of unemployment and, in some instances total exclusion. This makes the young accept low-quality jobs in the informal sector that do not necessarily match their skills. Evidence has shown that youth without prior experience face difficulty finding jobs in the labour market, which increases the likelihood of exclusion.

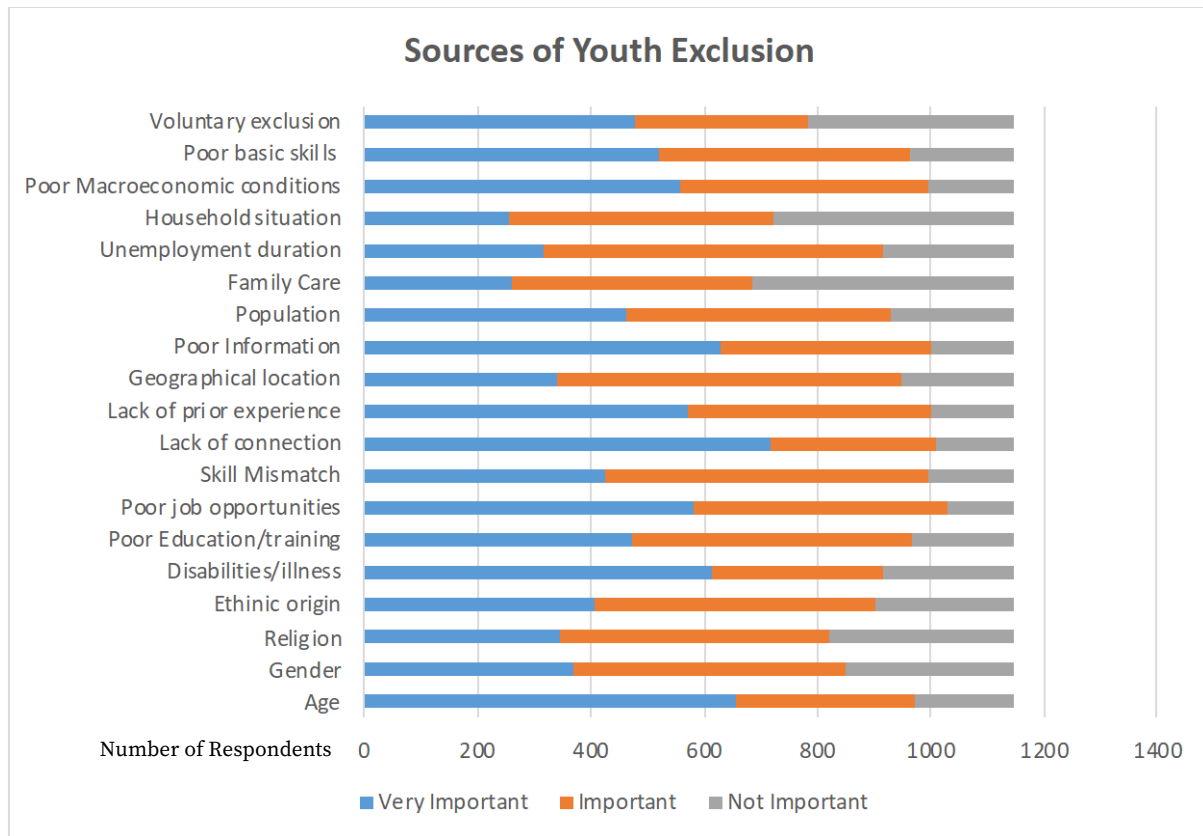
Youth without family connections face substantial barriers to getting stable employment. Youth exclusion scope is possibly reduced when an individual is from a family with high political or corporate status. In some cases, the economic power of the family is also likely to play an important role in finding jobs for their children. (Assaad & Barsoum, 2007) argued that the exclusion of some individuals is based on the inclusion of others. This study shows that most excluded youth are children of the poor and less privileged. Since education is closely connected to access to the labour market, they may find themselves in the same fate as their parents who earn a living from a low-paying job.

Geographical location can also contribute to understanding the nature of youth exclusion in the labour market (Olurinola & Fadayomi, 2013). Living in a particular area, and the economic condition of the location, influences the possibility of finding a job. Urbanisation has a direct impact on youth by increasing pressure on the already overstretched urban labour market and influencing their job and wage expectations (Boudarbat & Ajbilou, 2007). Furthermore, narrow job information channels are also identified as a source of youth exclusion. There is a paucity of institutions or programs that provide information regarding the economy's labour market and employment opportunities. Respondents to this project's survey stated that they lack information about finding jobs, as well as the access to job training and skills demanded by the labour market. Consequently, the Nigerian labour market is growing in informality because most youths, particularly new entrants, depend on informal jobs. Poor macroeconomic conditions are also significant sources of exclusion in the labour market. This is in support of Wooden (1999) findings that overall economic levels is a factor that impede youth employment.

The key barriers to youth exclusion in the labour market are age, gender, religion, ethnic origin, disabilities/illness, poor education/skills, poor job opportunities, skills mismatch, lack of family connection, lack of prior experience, geographical location, limited information channels, population growth, family care/marriage, unemployment duration, household situation, poor macroeconomic conditions, and voluntary exclusion. Amongst all these, poor job opportunities rank highest as the most fundamental source of exclusion, followed by a lack of family connections. Family care and household situation rank lowest as the important source of exclusion. An economy

characterized by numerous exclusionary factors is expected to record significant loss in productivity and its young individuals destined to be known as ‘Generation Jobless’.

Figure 8: Sources of Youth Exclusion



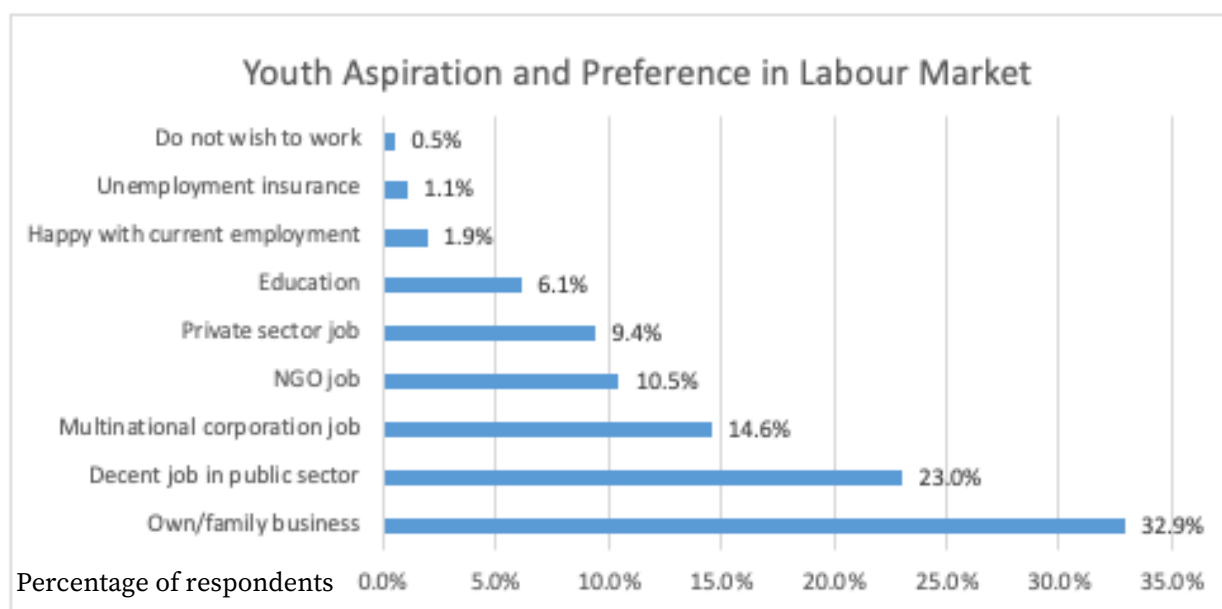
### Youth Preferences and Aspirations

To identify the set of expectations and alternatives for young people in the labour market, we asked the respondents questions about their preferences and aspirations with respect to employment. The lack of data on ‘young jobseekers’ aspirations has led to policy decisions being made on inaccurate premises. Understanding youth career preferences, life goals, and aspirations is imperative to guide policymaking. The survey results show that contributing and participating in community-related affairs stands out as the most important for young people. Many youths are quite interested in having a good family life and being very successful at work (see table 1). At the same time, very few care about having rich working experiences and having lots of money.

Table 1: Youth aspirations and preferences in life

Value (Life Aspirations and	Frequency	Percentage
Contributing and participating in community affairs	373	32.55
Having a good family life	289	25.22
Being successful in work	255	22.25
Having a lot of money	126	10.99
Having rich experience	103	8.99

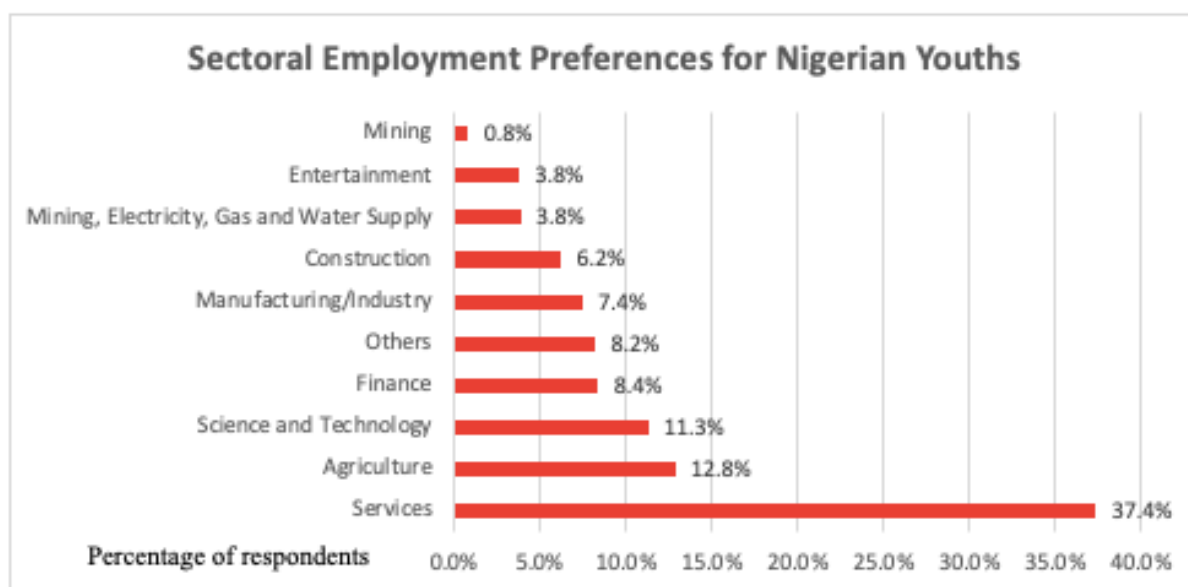
Figure 9: Youth aspirations and preferences in the labour market



Entrepreneurship is placed first among employment preferences, indicating that most young people are interested in and want to start their own firms. A large percentage of young people also prefer to work in the public sector, followed by multinational corporations (see figure 9). The desire for job security accounts for the highest concentration of youth preference for public sector employment. Compared to the public sector, the private sector is less appealing to young people in this regard. Furthermore, data reveal that further education is not a choice among young people and that many of them are dissatisfied with their existing jobs. Almost no one wanted to be idle or rely on government unemployment benefits.

The respondents were asked to select their preferred sector of job interest. By disaggregating the data further to identify the preferred sectors and subsectors for the youths, we discovered that the most desired sector in which to work is the service sector. The Nigerian service sector consists of several subsectors such as finance, retail and wholesale, real estate, telecommunication, ICT, entertainment, and education. For the basis of this study, we disaggregated the service sector to identify youth interest in some specific service subsectors like finance and entertainment. This finding is consistent with the current labour market demography in Nigeria, given the service sector's significant contribution to GDP over the past few year (Adetokunbo & Edioye, 2020). More so, Medina et al. (2017) reported Nigeria's informal sector to be service-driven (about 65 percent of GDP). The agricultural sector follows the service sector as the next preferred sector. ILO data indicates that the agricultural sector employs 35 percent of Nigeria's labour force and contributes 24 percent to GDP in 2020. Science and technology sectors are the next most preferred by young individuals, although the sector has a weak presence in the country relative to other emerging countries. Other youths indicated their preference to work in finance, manufacturing, industry sectors, etc.

Figure 10: Sectoral Employment Preferences for Nigerian Youths





## Consequences of Youth Exclusion

Youth exclusion in the labour market profoundly impacts youths' wellbeing and their family. The youth and their family tend to have a negative common belief that higher education is not a ticket for employment (see, Baah-Boateng, 2016). This creates some discouragement among young individuals in the labour market. About half of the youth seem to be discouraged from seeking employment due to a loss of hope in finding any job. Discouragement has become high among young people due to few opportunities for employment and. To put this in context, one in two young individuals are discouraged (not currently looking for job specifically because they believe there are no jobs available for them or none for which they qualify). Unemployment is rife with systematic barriers such as unfair recruitment, corruption, bribery, and nepotism dissuading many young men and women from participating in labour market. Youth discouragement is considered to be a more serious problem than unemployment. The discouraged youths have given up in searching for employment due to distinct challenges to inclusion across the country (limited access to education and training, high unemployment rates, gender inequality, lack of opportunities, poor infrastructure, limited access to finance, political instability, and insecurity, etc). With youth exclusion expanding further, there are socioeconomic consequences on the wellbeing of individuals. The study by Bäckman & Nilsson (2016) found that not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) may be both a step towards an unfavourable life career and a triggering factor for social exclusion. Furthermore, discouragement also has a significant impact on society as evidence has shown that social exclusion poses some physical, mental, and psychological risks to youths and people around them (Sapiro & Ward, 2020).

Given unemployment duration and exclusion from the labour market, we asked questions on some likely psychological effects due to feeling discouraged. The survey revealed evidence of youth facing psychological risk due to exclusion. The young population reported experiencing a high frequency of everyday job stress. Above 40 percent of youth indicated they experience nervousness and anxiety, trouble relaxing, easy irritation, trouble with sleep, tiredness, little pleasure in doing things, and loss of appetite. The nature of job stress less frequently reported (below 40 percent) was having trouble focusing, worrying, and depression. As a consequence of discouragement, many young people see migration as an alternative in hope for a better life and as a survival strategy to escape endemic unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria. With respect to the youth preference, the survey revealed that large percentage of youth consider migration abroad an option for better life opportunities and meeting employment aspirations.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria's consistent response with programs to curtail unemployment is commendable, although it has achieved little impact. Far from being ignored, the government has taken youth unemployment seriously by introducing different programs to address the problem. However, the programs have not adequately considered detailed information on youth's preferences, aspirations, and sources of exclusion. As a solution, there is the need to collect the appropriate data and comprehensively access the problem to inform policy. This study's data collection effort is essential to clearly identify factors serving as barriers to youth inclusion and the condition of the Nigerian labour market with respect to youth preferences. Based on the findings, we conclude that youth face a number of barriers to participating and excelling in the Nigerian labour market related to age, gender, access to information, access to job opportunities, level of social networks and corruption, etc. The youth increasingly face these factors of labour market exclusion, which can build up over time. These exclusionary barriers are also likely to have an intergenerational effect since many young individuals are discouraged and beginning to see migration as a strategy for a meaningful life.

The lack of data on youth's aspirations and sources of youth exclusion from the labour market has led to policy interventions being designed on inaccurate premises. In other words, these policies are blind to the barriers youth face. Data collection on these exclusionary sources will unveil the nature and magnitude of these barriers and inform the right policy interventions and actions. Policy implementation in Nigeria is fraught with inadequate information and data. As a recommendation, government policy should be geared towards data collection on conditions of youth in the labour market. Barriers to youth inclusion and youth unemployment are primarily a structural phenomenon in need of structural and multidimensional solutions. Many policies that have attempted to create opportunities for youth employment have been grossly inadequate without delivering expected outcomes.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The results offer substantial evidence to provide a significant policy options for Nigeria and other economies alike. The findings are also important for future research directions. In order to effectively address the sources of youth exclusion, youth aspiration and preferences, we need a policy mix that will be comprehensive, inclusive, and responsive in both its formulation and implementation. Based on the findings, some specific policy recommendation include.

1. Proper data collection on the sources of exclusion and aspirations that could help in the design of effective and inclusive policies for employment.
2. Design a macroeconomic policy that encourages business growth especially in sectors that youth indicate preferences, particularly service sectors and agriculture. The policy should also aim at creating innovation hub that would provide a conducive environment by supporting employers in creation of decent jobs and entrepreneurs since most youths prefer entrepreneurship to working in any organization and other sectors.
3. The youth lack information about the labour market to enable them take advantage of existing employment opportunities. There should be programs that provide job assistance and help in disseminating labour market information to youth.
4. The government should build databases of employment opportunities for employers. This will remove some of these obstacles and enable effective job matching between employers and job seekers.
5. The research highlights the fact that skill mismatch is a factor that impedes youth employment. Policy should target at addressing skills mismatch issues, as they hamper the economic potential, productivity, and well-being of youth.
6. The survey revealed that many young people base their job search on informal network. This implies that young people with little family connections will have a harder time getting employment. The government should enhance the collection and distribution of information on the labour market. The main responsibilities of these institutions should range from career and vocational training to job search assistance and access to finance.

Generally, the survey revealed that skills is an important factor that youth believe limit their employment prospects. Youth enter the market without having the required skillsets – vocational skills, soft skills (communication, negotiation, assertiveness, cooperation), cognitive skills (problem solving, decision making, critical thinking) and emotional (self-control, managing stress). It is thus not surprising that there appears to be growing evidence in some economies that vocational training, soft skills, and cash transfers helps in breaking some of the barriers youth face in the labour market (see, Attanasio, Kugler, & Meghir, 2011; Attanasio et al., 2015; Alzúa, Cruces, & Lopez, 2016; Ibarrarán, Kluve, Ripani, & Rosas Shady, 2019; Field, Linden, Malamud, Rubenson, & Wang, 2019; Alfonsi et al., 2020; Barrera-Osorio, Kugler, & Silliman, 2021; Unnikrishnan et al., 2022 etc.). Therefore, interventions, particularly those designed toward enriching the available skills spectrum remain one of the preferred options. Majority of Nigerian policymakers do not

consider evaluations to be a crucial step in the design and implementation of a program intervention. As a result, program evaluations are frequently absent from impact assessments. For future research direction, evaluations to assess the causal inference of these interventions, particularly skills training, job search assistance, access to finance can be experimented to ascertain which policy works for the teeming youth population in Nigeria.

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